

2015 Chet Perry Breakthrough Achiever Jessica Estrada



"Everybody looked down on me. Everybody thought I was no good."

When Jessica Estrada moved to Florida from Oregon, she was a very different person than she is today. Learning disabilities and a speech impediment prevented Jessica from developing self-confidence.

"I didn't speak much," she says. "I was very shy."

That was in 2013. Shortly after arriving in Fort Myers, Jessica spotted the Goodwill Job-Link Family Resource Center on Palm Beach Boulevard in Fort Myers. Up until that point, Jessica only knew Goodwill for their Retail & Donation Centers.

Jessica, who dropped out of school in the eighth grade, signed up for GED classes at the Job-Link and entered the Beyond Jobs program, an initiative designed to provide women with tools and support to build a career.

"I never had a job before coming here, besides raising my kids," says Jessica. "I learned when you go to interview you have to dress nice, shake a person's hand, look them in the eye."

Jessica's experience at the Job-Link was transformative. She began volunteering at the center, and eventually earned her first-ever part-time job as a Job-Link assistant in 2014. Today, when clients enter the center, she greets them, sets appointments, and helps them file for assistance programs online. On average, Jessica helps about 700 clients a month.

"I fell in love with the job," says Jessica. "I'm glad I walked into this Job-Link and found out what it's all about. I like helping people."

Kaysy Maradiaga, the Palm Beach Blvd. Job-Link Coordinator, knew right away that Jessica was special.

"Jessica was the first person I met here," says Kaysy. "When I first started, she was more timid. I love her, she's so amazing."

Jessica's biggest test came in late 2015, when Kaysy was out for maternity leave. After several weeks of intensive training, the former volunteer ran Goodwill's busiest Job-Link center for two months.

"I took that chance to see if I could do it," says Jessica. "I think I did pretty good!"

When not assisting others in the community, Jessica is a mother to four girls, and a grandmother to two.

"I don't have to depend on anyone else," Jessica says of how her life has changed at Goodwill. "Goodwill helped me prove myself, showed me I could do something better with my life. I'm more happy, outgoing. Before here, I was sad, depressed. My husband says he never saw me so happy."